

Research and Bat-Scorpions

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Summary: Doctors Santana and Carson really need to find the research file on the old project. Unfortunately, it's nowhere in the system, so they have to drive out and find the original scientist in a weird little desert town called Night Vale. Outsider POV of WTNV, because that's always fun.

Research and Bat-Scorpions

"What do you mean it's not there?" Doctor Santana asked incredulously. "That's top-level classified government research. How on Earth could that have been misplaced?"

Carson shrugged helplessly, because he was only hired three months ago and apparently this guy who headed the previous project has been gone for seven times that, so he's really just here as a sounding board for his boss's frustrated rantings. Santana sighed and flipped her long hair over her shoulder, swiveling on the heel of a shoe that can't be sensible for science and bringing her cell phone back up to her ear in one smooth movement.

"No, it's not here, I already looked in the hard copies... well, then he must have taken it with him. Where was he last assigned? ...I don't know. Well, why should I? Look, I'll find out. Yes, I will, I'll find it. Goodbye," she snapped before bringing the phone down and glaring daggers at it so hard Carson was slightly impressed it didn't just shatter under the angry gaze.

"Find out where this Carlos is currently stationed," she snapped before storming out of the room, heels clicking angrily on the mirror-bright laboratory floor.

"Oookay... can I have a last name? Or..." he trailed off as her clicking heels faded down the hallway, sighed and resigned himself to at least two hours of scrolling through every Carlos they had ever employed and cross-referencing them.

~o~

"So you found him?" Santana asked, substantially more bubbly and optimistic now that she was not at immediate risk of being fired. To be fair, that was something that would tend to put a damper on one's spirits.

"I think so," he said, leaning to the side so she could read the screen over his shoulder. "He's been in a small town called Night Vale in Arizona for the past year and a half."

Santana's eyebrows crinkled together in thought. "What on Earth has a scientist of his caliber been doing in a hick desert town in the middle of nowhere for that long?"

Carson shrugged helplessly. "Dunno."

She frowned thoughtfully for a second more before appearing to give up and return to the task at hand. "Is there an email, phone number?"

"Nope. There's an address, something about a bloodstone incantation, and I'm not sure what this language is... it looks a bit like Latin but with more 'z's..."

"Uh," Santana said, speechless for a rare and precious moment. "I guess we're going to Night Vale."

~o~

Going to Night Vale proved substantially more difficult than it had any right to be. It didn't show up on most maps, and was in a slightly different location on every map it did appear on. They ended up only being able to narrow it down to a general vicinity before giving up and eventually regressing to the highly scientific method of driving in circles until they eventually stumbled over it.

During their twenty-seventh circuit of their desert, the car radio suddenly flickered on, producing nothing but a staticky buzz for a minute or two before a clear, mellifluous voice began to flow from the speakers.

"Outgoing mayor Pamela Winchel held an impromptu press conference earlier today, during which she simply stood on the steps of City Hall and did a rather good impersonation of the Faceless Old Woman Who Secretly Lives in Your Home. Doctors were on the scene shortly and while there will be extensive scarring, I'm told they were able to reattach her face."

"And now, a word from our sponsors."

The two scientists stared in mute, abject horror for a minute at the car radio as it went on to describe in great detail the eldritch abominations that would devour you if you did not first devour your mandatory weekly slice of Big Rico's pizza. Santana was the first to unfreeze, and punched the mute button with such force Carson was mildly surprised she didn't break the military-grade radio.

"What the fuck," she said after a moment of silence, accurately summing up Carson's own thoughts.

"At least we know we're going the right way now," he pointed out mildly. "If we're picking up the community radio."

"It's not April Fool's Day, is it?" she asked, even though it was the middle of September. "That's gotta be a practical joke."

He wasn't sure how to respond to that beyond a noncommittal shrug, because it had sounded awfully serious to him, so they drove in silence until power lines and a radio tower started to peek out from behind the towering sand dunes.

As they drove into town, Carson's eyes immediately widened and he practically smashed his face against the window. "Millie!" he said, waving for her attention and completely forgetting to use her last name. "Do you see that? I think I just saw a contained gravitational anomaly right there on the side of the road! And that girl who just smiled at us had shark teeth!"

She frowned without looking and pressed a hand to his forehead. "Are you feeling alright? We've been out in the sun for a long time... the sooner we find Carlos and get the hell out of here the better."

He glanced back at her and opened his mouth to object, but when he looked back out the window both the girl and the floating mailbox were gone, and he tried to remember the symptoms of heat stroke.

Eventually, they pulled up in front of a low-to-the-ground building. One of the windows was smashed in and leaking smoke, and the other was painted with strange, glowing symbols in what looked like blood. Santana looked down at the address in her hand, then up at the building, then back down at the address, then back up at the building.

"I guess this is it," she said after double-checking several more times. "Doesn't look like much."

"Maybe he moved out," Carson suggested hopefully, inwardly crossing his fingers that they wouldn't have to go in and would be able to get out of this weird, weird town sooner than later and all in one piece.

"Maybe," she agreed. "But we have to check."

Which is how they found themselves standing in front of a battered door and having a staring contest with the doorbell, which Carson swore had growled at him. Santana eventually decided to compromise and knocked on the door, and they heard the sound of breaking glass followed by a curse, then:

"Just a minute! Ah, shit, no... stay. Stay. Good. Okay, what is it this time? I stopped using pens and I haven't even said anything about mount-oh," he cut himself off lamely as he swung the door open and saw them.

Carson was fairly sure the man was wearing what had once been a lab coat, though it was colored with all manner of interesting chemicals and one of the sleeves was completely burned off. There were goggles perched on his head and a small fire starting in his hair, which he

absently patted out. And was that a snake around his neck? -no, it couldn't be, it had wings.

"You're not the sheriff's secret police," he said after a moment, seeming to startle Santana back to awareness.

"Um. No. We're not. I'm Doctor Millie Santana and this is my colleague, Will Carson, and we'd like to ask you about some research you did a while back?"

"Oh, of course. Come in!" he said cheerily. "Mind the spiders!" he called over his shoulder.

~o~

"So... Carlos," Santana said as he rifled through a file cabinet that looked like it had been partially dissolved. "We were wondering... well, what it is you do here."

"Oh, Night Vale is the most scientifically interesting community in the United States!" he said happily. "There's mutations, temporal anomalies, vortexes, mirages..."

"I told you I saw a gravitational anomaly!" Carson said triumphantly to Santana.

"Oh, is it Wednesday already?" Carlos asked idly without looking up, prompting strange looks from both the visiting scientists.

"So... this is normal for you?" Carson asked hesitantly.

"More or less. Just a second," he amended, reaching over and turning up the volume on the radio in the background. Both scientists immediately recognized the voice as the same one they had heard over the car radio.

"-it seems we have visitors to our humble desert community today, listeners. Two people, a man and a woman, came into town earlier today after spending some time driving in aimless circles out in the Sand Wastes- but then, aren't we all driving in aimless circles, hoping to reach somewhere meaningful before we sputter and die and drift onward into the void?

"Anyways, these two lost and frightened outsiders have parked their car outside of Carlos's lab. My boyfriend. Carlos. I am, of course, sure that he's fine (he is a scientist, after all), but just in case he isn't, I have their license plate number and detailed physical- oh. Just a moment, listeners, Carlos is calling me. Hello?"

Carson and Santana turned to see Carlos holding a cell phone to his ear with an fondly exasperated expression on his face, and they had the bizarre experience of hearing him speak both in person and over the radio.

"Cecil, darling, please stop attempting to send lynch mobs after anyone that comes near me. It's putting a damper on my social life. They're just scientists from the company I used to work for. But can you pick up the groceries on the way home? Thanks, dear. I love you too," he said before hanging up, apparently unworried about the fact that the entirety of Night Vale had most likely just heard a private

conversation between him and his boyfriend over the radio.

"Um," Carson said, very eloquently, and Carlos seemed to startle back into the present.

"Right! What were you looking for again?"

"Who were you just talking to?" Santana chose to ask instead.

"Hm? Oh, my boyfriend, Cecil. He's the Voice of Night Vale," he informed them with a note of pride in his voice. "He just gets a bit protective sometimes."

"A bit," she repeated incredulously. "Was he about to read our plates over the radio?"

"Yeah, but that's nothing. You should've seen what he did to Telly the barber," he said absently, moving on to a file cabinet that was precariously supporting a terrarium full of what looked like the hybrid children of bats and scorpions, but substantially more large and purple than either. The two scientists waited for him to continue, but no explanation was forthcoming.

"Okay then," Carson said, if only to put an end to the awkward silence of an unanswered question, moments before Carlos shot back up from his stooped position over the bottom drawer of the file cabinet, making the terrarium rattle dangerously.

"Found it!" the scientist reported triumphantly, handing them a thick, manila file that was slightly singed around the edges. "I think that's the one."

Santana eagerly snatched it away and quickly leafed through it. "Perfect! Thank you so, so much. You probably just saved our jobs."

"My pleasure," Carlos said cheerfully. "Oh, and just so you know, if you're not staying overnight you'll probably want to leave now. The Sand Wastes get a lot more... active at night."

The two were gone so fast they left cloudy afterimages of themselves where they had been.

End
file.